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ON PAGE A-7

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Vendetta is alleged in pope plot

ROME (UPI) — The Bulgarian Embassy said yesterday a personal vendetta motivated a Bulgarian official to accuse Sofia and Moscow of involvement in a plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II.

An embassy spokesman made the remark in response to a New York Times article that said Jordan Mantarov, former deputy commercial attache at the Bulgarian Embassy in Paris, made the accusations to French intelligence officials.

Wednesday's article said Mantarov made the charges after defecting to France in July 1981.

"Mantarov was never in France as a diplomat or as a secret agent,"

said the spokesman for the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome. "His so-called revelations are designed to exploit this situation for his own personal settling of accounts."

According to The New York Times, Mantarov told French intelligence officials the Soviet KGB and the Bulgarian intelligence agency DS were behind the May 13, 1981, attempt by Turkish gunman Mehmet Ali Agca to kill the pope.

Agca critically wounded the pope, but was captured in St. Peter's Square in the Vatican immediately after the shooting and is now serving a life sentence in prison.

The 24-year-old Turk subse-

quently told Italian investigators that Bulgarian intelligence agents organized his attempt to assassinate the pontiff.

Italy has arrested one Bulgarian in the case, the former Rome station chief of Balkan Airlines, Serguey Ivanov Antonov, and charged him with complicity in the shooting.

A Rome court charged with ruling on questions of custody today rejected Antonov's request for provisional liberty. His lawyers argued he should be freed for lack of evidence, but legal sources said the court ruled that statements by Agca implicating Antonov as an accomplice represented sufficient

grounds to keep the Bulgarian in jail.

Agca's statements have never been detailed.

Both Bulgaria and the Soviet Union have strenuously denied allegations of involvement in the assassination attempt.

"He's only trying to revive accusations that fell flat a long time ago," the Bulgarian Embassy spokesman said of the reported revelations by Mantarov.

In denying that Mantarov was a diplomat at the nation's Paris embassy, the Bulgarian spokesman said Mantarov instead was a maintenance mechanic at Bulgaria's Agromascinaipox agricultural company in the French capital.